

Prudently aplomb, a home rests atop an atom bomb

NICO MORETA



CHANO DEL RÍO

He strictly calls Sunset Cesar Chavez. He never goes that far West. He couldn't care for the beach unless he's getting his leftover spaghetti sandy in Samaná, but he's far from that. Chano is close to his words. He manipulates speech in a kind of deluded state. 'Kind of' only because he cares about it all. The truth, the essence hiding under the land that makes baby Chano chisel into black and white words and graphs. Bothered by chronic loss of color because the greyscale of Los Angeles' legal documents, Figures 3's, 4's, and 4.1's, steal his focus, and indicate the steep grade on all sides of his neighborhood. The only thing he cares about: maintaining those hills, the fort surrounding *su barrio*. The 'kind of' then is in how sentimental Chano can be over bureaucracy. Scope of Work copies filling folder files, loose blueprints, and CRA, CRA, CRA. "If they made all this up, then why can't I?" It's a simple question, but naïve at heart. Chano is aware of his misguided murmurs. Few people care for the jargon and poetry like he does...

They plan to raze the hill. The shallowest one. The real Pancake Hill. It's Chano's favorite. Porque Chano loves El Sicómoro. Sico lives there, the oldest citizen of El Pueblo de la Reyna de los Angeles y Las Californias y Las Americas. Predating Colombus and Fe-

lipe de Neve and Mulholland and Schwarzenegger and Spaghetti Garcetti. It's 72 ft tall with a 212 ft canopy. Magnifico. A true and untouched titan of history—silhouetted by capital punishment. They want our basin's baron bulldozed, razed, and regraded for an equally magnificent parking lot. Chano, deluded by councilchambers' echo of faithless "I's", sits across the predetermined stump in faithful desperation.

"Sico. Who rested under your shade before me?" Chano's incumbent compulsion to save Sico has fallen out of pace. He has rationed it best to listen for Sico's wind-rustled whispers.

"It's too many to count."

"Do you have a favorite?"

Sico couldn't begin to pick. All that time spent witnessing the world bend around him. "All are welcome to sit under my canopy."

Chano has an agenda as always. Sico listens in, patient as always. "But what do you make of Tabula Rasa? The new Plaza will have you felled. It looks like Pancake will be leveled like Denny and Goldsmith by tomorrow."

Sico waits unworried. The wind picks up. Sico brings this old friend near and hums a hymn unspoken for centuries. His acorns rattle, shake, and float off in slow and goading gusts. "Chano, you speak like doomsday of my death. I'm old and I'm withered, but my stump won't budge. I've stood here for years, and my roots have reached deep. So deep it seems they're buried within you too.

Chano mirrors Sico's reserve. He wants to ramble on about the project's hypocrisy. That's what Pancake is to him. This tragic irony. His mother's home among Uncle Bunker's mining tailings. Landslides plague liquefactive hillsides. He's overspent and

overflowing with words, but he sits. He keeps it to himself. While Sico’s wisdom won’t weather his worries, a seed is planted within him that mires him content under the shades last breath.

What’s Chano like? What does he like? Talking about Chano’s easiest when you talk about things in his orbit. Talking about him’s easy. Talking to him’s hard. Keeping up with his thoughts? Impossible. What was he thinking about before his brother Luis del Rio started fishing, arm deep, in the fridge, “Chano, tienes hambre?”

Silence. The TV illuminates Chano from behind. He’s in deep concentration. Curled up within his monitor on the table as usual. The TV mirrors his thoughts, rerailing his thought-process. Oh yeah: A continuous trapezoidal concrete channel. [1] Lost in the shallow stream thicket trash heap del Rio Porciúncula. Concrete concentration. Great at draining runoff, bad at being a river. Okay for fishing, and therefore, okay for the egrets. He attempts to translate this preoccupation, mumbling “Tienen hambre.”

“What’s that? You hungry or not?” Luis really couldn’t be bothered. He’s reeling in his catch. Pulling out some salmon, he pierces plastic wrap. Paranoid. Investigating its pink for any inconsistencies. He pauses the prosecution to do the same to Chano. Grabbing the remote, he pauses the TV, nagging, “You been sitting there for 3 hours. ¡Que flojo!”

Without the broadcast, Chano loses the battle to keep concentrated, realizing he’s staring aimlessly at a Rube Goldberg cartoon. Prudently aplomb, a house rests atop an atom bomb. He really hasn’t eaten in hours. “¡Mírate! So what if there’s lead in it? You’re gonna eat it anyway.”

The funny thing is that Luis is just getting started with his autopsy. He stares into the fish’s mouth, he slides his fingers between its gills, hangs it from its tail, doing just about anything to steal Chano’s attention. It’s tough when everyone around you has this kind of

gravity.

“It’s not just lead. These things got Mercury, too.” He stares into its eyes. “Cough it up, motherfucker.” He grabs a knife, and digs a line down through its belly. Chano watches and thinks. Luis is more mercurial than that fish could ever be. He’s got plumbum for brains too. That’s why he keeps things simple: fish. It’s all he thinks about. It’s all he does, but don’t get confused. There’s a world of life in there for Luis. Del Rio. Born this way, I guess. He’s kinda funny too. Chano buys in.

“Pobre pez. What he do cop?”

“Drunk and disorderly.” He picks it up and stares at it. “Found him swimming upstream in a clearly designated downstream zone.” He slaps it. “Fuckin salmon.”

“Need to learn their place.” Chano unpauses the broadcast. He’s watching a neighborhood council meeting. This time with full attention. A woman is waving her hands furiously. The on-screen caption reads:

Paloma Pluto

Arborist, Landscape Architect, and District 1 Councilwoman

Born and raised on Pancake Hill

Her gestures start to make sense once the volume reaches a threshold that surpasses Luis’s sizzling fish fry...

What if Perry Miller just blew up the Hill? What if he rolled down it on an existential boulder like a Sisyphean log roller until it stopped a half a mile away, then he detonated a hydrogen bomb that turned the Hill into a crater? What if he pumped the entire Mediterranean sea through a high-pressured hydraulic hose, and washed away the Hill like dirt off a dog? If he did, he’d be a lot like the West Coast civil engineers of the 20th century. What if it got in his way of progress?

La Sagrada Família stands one meter below the nearby Montjuïc Hill in Barcelona because Gaudí thought his creation should not surpass God's. You see, even this infamous engineering feat of mankind carries a humble acknowledgment that there are limits to human progress on Earth. In our hyper-industrialized world, where we can build as high as we can afford, Gaudí couldn't ignore his human impact on the environmental landscape.

Chano, seized with importance, stands up, recalling what he was thinking before his brother's interruption.

“¡Ay, Coño! You scared me! Why'd you do that?”

“I'm gonna go to the library.”

“Oh, okay—”

“Leave me leftovers.” He's already out the door. Luis, caught off-guard, is left floundering over his brother's odd erraticisms. He stares at his fish doing the same, hopping in a pan popping with piping hot oil. He tunes out Pluto. Her gravity is all-too-much. He can't think about the hoses and the Hill without erupting.

The Hill is unchanging, the Hill is something to surrender on. In the case of 1950s Los Angeles, however, city planners washed away the entirety of Bunker Hill, in one of the largest redevelopment projects known to the West Coast. 136-acres wide and about a hundred feet in the air. Much of Bunker Hill ceased to exist once the Community Redevelopment Association pumped hydraulics all the way from the Pacific Ocean to wash away an entire neighborhood with a hose, an entire piece of Los Angeles' natural skyline, in order to build a new commercial skyline. A true 'City upon a Hill', with no Hill to shine upon.

Chano was never going to the library. Although, he's definitely learning something. It's been a hundred years since Bunker Hill. He's sitting on Bigelow at the top of Blueberry

Hill, the tallest peak in Pancake, thinking about how. Pluto's deliverance rings in his head. Somebody left the TV on in Chano's room. He surveys the land, all the way to Signal Hill, watching Long Beach's gantry cranes peck away at precious cargo, tracing it back to the place he sits. Meanwhile, the whole time, his eyes watch...

as hoses run 15 miles long

under cars slunk through basements over borders bled red

pumping sea diesel 35 feet per second

a pitiful 24 miles an hour

can't take the Parkway going those speeds

take the side streets

slither slither

snake in the grass

of vacant lots soon parking spots...

achem...

The World Weed Whacking Commission

boasts a new industrial mission

Project Turn Downtown Upside Down

Make It An Aquarium

bulldoze hose raze

tract of homes set for home team stadium

and use whats left to pave the -ways

(free-, express-, by-,)

as hoses rise 15m high...

above blighted hoods stood towering over sooted slums

squeeze the Pacific through a bonafide water gun

slither slither

snake in the grass

of spite mounds soon leveled ground

Public Question for Councilwoman Pluto:

If you're moving head-on at a rate of 24 miles per hour,
how long does it take you to wash Bunker Hill away?

That's a tricky question...

¹~~1963 - 1956 = 7~~

²~~1966 - 1948 = 18~~

³~~1966 - 1928 = 38~~

⁴~~1970 - 1928 = 42~~

⁵~~1970 - 1909 = 61~~

⁶~~1909 - 2003 = 94~~

1 The project broke ground in 1956. Half of the 181-acres were washed away in just 8 years. 60% of those residents moved to an area within one mile of Bunker Hill; 23% within two. 7% self relocated, while 17% were relocated into public housing half of which were Mexican American.

2 The rest was estimated to take 3 more years. However, by 1966, all that occurred besides futile and lengthy legal battles, was the resignation of William Sesnon, “who had spent his entire 18 year tenure between 1948-1966 trying to redevelop Bunker Hill.” Sesnon gave up. Destruction takes a toll.

3 C. C. Bigelow’s ‘Bigelow Plan,’ a 1928 scheme for removing the Hill using hydraulic mining equipment, was proposed. The Hill had been an impediment to ‘progress’ for decades. It seems like redevelopment had been on its way much earlier than the day they broke ground.

4 In fact, the CRA’s poor business practices evacuated tenants years before litigation would even come close to an end; years before demolition should have begun. They forgot that they were landlords. Many of their tenants were furious. In 1970, after refusing the CRA’s bribes for so long, Stuart Oliver’s house, the last-standing home “and the stub of Bunker Hill on which it once stood had been demolished,” (KCET, The Last House Standing On Bunker Hill)

5 The Hill has been seen as an impediment to progress for years. The Hill street tunnels were boring through the hill by 1909, but what’s a start and an end date even mean to an indefinite redevelopment...

6 “Despite not having the proper demolition permit nor performed a state-mandated environmental impact report, G.H. Palmer Associates illegally demolished the house in 2003 to make way for the Orsini condominium complex development.”



What Sesnon never knew was the goldmine the hill was sitting on. Acres of Bromine & Crude Salt sit below Chano and his pavement. He lies next to Sico for hours, listening to Pluto’s plea, remembering the mining operation as though he had read it from a book.

Prudent Pancake was given a grubstake and a jackass, and sent on his merry way. The task: strike gold for Tabula Rasa. While he never struck gold, Pancake did strike brown and yellow.

It was a golden-brown afternoon, and Pancake was rambling down through now-known Chavez Ravine after a long day of prospecting, and decided to rest. He slept through the night. It was said that the jackass had undone his ropes and gone missing over his owners neglect. After hours of feverish searching the next day, Pancake heard the jackass’s bray from a hillside over. When the jackass came into site, he was stood on an outcropping of salt, licking it like syrup off it’s plate. Never had salt been treated with such sweetness. The rest was history.

The run of the mill, which was located upon the hill side, was unsuccessful. The institution was shut down and sold; and since that time little has been done with it, except that it has been leased to miners who work in a small way. Or not.

The 1949 Housing Act for America’s post-World War II housing market created ‘Eminent domain,’ a program that allows the government to seize private property for government subsidized public housing. This Act would later pave the way for the Fair Deal under Truman, which, while eerily similar, maintained the right to eminent domain while uncoupling it from the building of public housing. In fewer words, this meant that neighborhoods like Bunker Hill in Los Angeles could be bought up, and sold to the developer with the tallest wallet to stand on. The situation becomes all the more concerning when you learn of the challenges in the way of private development. Of the refusal from small-game residents to submit to the terror of redevelopment forces. Of the 9,000 individuals displaced, in an ethnic whitewashing of community and place. But what drives urban renewal projects?

What’s the Tongva phrase?

Yaraarkomokre ‘eyoo’ooxono. We remember our land.

Yaraarkomokre ‘eyoo’ooxon. Our land remembers us.

“Sico. If you’re an oak tree, why are you named after the Sycamore?”

“Chano. Why, at first, I was a Sycamore.”

“What happened? You’re not telling me you turned to an oak?”

“It’s truly a miracle, you wouldn’t believe.”

“I’ve been fixed on tragedy. I could use a miracle. Please, Sico.”

“Ok, ok. Here, I can tell you about my oldest friend, El Carpintero the Woodpecker. How is that?”

“That sounds wonderful!”

“It all began during La Reina’s most infamous flood. Centuries ago, as the Creator’s tempest cast sea levels twenty meters high,” Sico begins, as static muddies in frequencies tuned to elder waters.

El Sicómoro, held fast by Lady Los Angeles, struggled mightily. Moss clings to felled matter floating in spirals losing True North, as logs loosen and swirl in foolproof whirlpools. The drowning urban sprawl wells up at the top of Sico’s stalk. Certain to survive, Sico, with his roots run deep, had endured, and will endure, all that Earth Mother could challenge him with: from battles of raging fires to once in a generation freezes and now epochal deluges.

Through the raucous chaos, through branches torn from rushing riptides, and roots

snapped from roaring currents. Sico stays calm and collected. He has to assure the safety of those closest to him. Drowning, he whispers to his samaras, “fly off, and settle when the sky is blue again.” Gasping, he whispers to his branches, “float off, and catch all those cast adrift.” Crying, he whispers to his precious Woodpecker, El Carpintero, nested high up in his trunk, “stay put, for you are safest atop my canopy.”

And they do just that. Samaras flutter between raindrops, batting their wings in wait for rain clouds’ clearing. Driftwoods coil and bob, as hollow home buoys for coyotes cast astray. Meanwhile, El Carpintero hides away in his locked tower, clung to Sico, clung to the Earth.

El Sicómoro, surrendering into Lady Madonna’s arms, begs the Earth: “Por favor. Hold me close. Offer me the endurance to shelter life under my shade once more. If not I, then spare my Carpintero.”

“Spare me! Spare me!” In buzzing accompaniment, among horizontal rain drops and thundering clamors, the pecker peeks its head out, “Spare me! So that I can take the mighty Sycamores seeds far and wide, and have him bud anew!”

Trading breaths above rising waters, the two plead to Nuestra Reina for perseverance. Now, it’s hard to tell where mercy lies, on the spectrum of survival. From within? Above? Between? However, the two were spared, and they were spared from below, by a measly nut.

As wind gusts blow leaves in tormented suspension and waters wash hillsides into the Pacific, the flurry slows down if only for an instant over the tree and its bird buried within. The riptides subside and the currents lie, still. Grayness clears to make way for blue and gold. The Sun beats, and it beats on the water so strong it almost seems to boil. It bubbles, and it bubbles, and up from below comes an acorn. El Carpintero

The excitement of home, and all things home, and when home was simpler. Now forced to bring home here where home is unclear. Here/there is my primary care. The awareness of their interplay. Key word: play because play, in an effort to create, is the expression of my care in the history I reiterate. Two poles, periphere, reciprocate none. Two poles don't exist when the ratio

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“Yeah, they can overwrite any planning committee decision. Pluto knew that too, so she pretty much filibustered it. I think she wanted to prove a point. She talked about this town from the beginning. Bunker Hill and everything.”

“My lord. One big guilt trip.”

“No, it was something else. Something better, bigger. She knows, even if Pancake began as a pile of waste, it’s become something bigger. The first American neighborhood made from repurposed waste, from reclaimed land. The first neighborhood to acknowledge the consequences of urbanization and do something real about it.” Chano never expects a response to his white noise discourse, but Luis is especially engaged tonight.

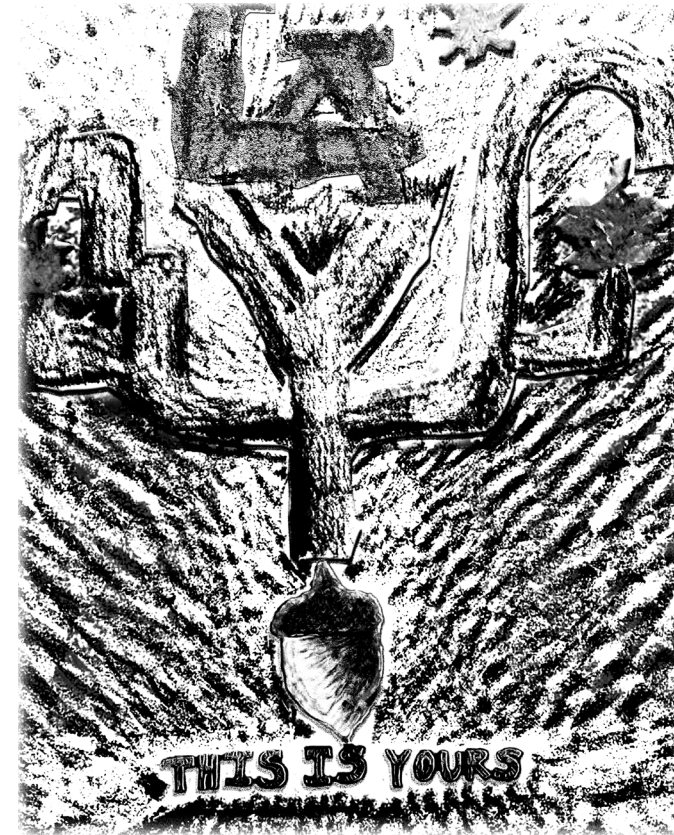
“Chano, I know you have your ideas about things, but what does it matter? It was all an accident. Thousands of Caribbean immigrants come to Los Angeles, seeking asylum after the hurricane. What were they gonna do with ‘em? They threw us on these hills, and turned away. They clowned us naming this place Pancake. We got the shit-end. And now they’re gonna take away the only land untouched by machines and build some rent-hiking development. It just keeps getting shittier.”

So, what made Seattle and Denny the perfect blank slate for some of the first hill razing experiments? Andrew Karvonen, author of “Metronatural: Inventing and reworking urban nature in Seattle,” wrote of an eight year period of drastic historical moments that paved the way for Seattle’s progressive urban planning schema. First, in 1889, a tragic fire burned Seattle’s entire downtown to the ground, clearing nearly fifty blocks in the heart of the city. In Karvonen’s words, “the fire was a godsend [for city planners] because it created a nearly clean slate to build new.” Second, by 1893, the Great Northern Railroad finally reached Seattle. Now, there’s no doubt that railroads were integral to 19th century U.S. Westward expansion, allowing commerce to run freely from coast to coast. Coincidentally, four years later those cargo containers would be stockpiled with gold from the freshly broken ground of the Klondike territory in nearby Canada. Bringing Seattle’s population from 3,500 to over 240,000 in just 13 years since the deposit’s discovery in 1897.

A railroad bringing commerce and hundreds of thousands of gold-lusting opportunists quite literally created Seattle. It's in moments like these that entire American cities were built with the cement mix of progressive urban planning that would solidify the buildings, structures, and processes that proliferate the expansionist doctrine of urban life in Western America. But, let's pause on that. Now, how exactly were these hills razed?

And he did. El Carpintero put beak to bedrock and began carving out the hills of Los Angeles in Sico's roots' shape. He chiseled and chiseled, as if he was industry itself, and by the end of his tenure, El Carpintero had seen it all between hard-toiled pecks. El Niño, raging fires. He saw cultures come and settle and shrink and grow all through the reflection of gold-rich hillsides. The Tongva, the Kizh, the Spanish. But El Carpintero's beak was pointed elsewhere. He's a worker, certainly not a historian, and when you're a worker tried-and-true, you follow the trade. So, logically, once the land was fully rebuilt to its original glory, and there was no honest work to follow, he ended up where everyone else was near the turn of the century—the Tabu-la Rasa mines. He should've known. A woodpecker could never be the canary in a mine. They were short some workers, and he loved to work. Why not do the work of two? Well, it all caught up to him. El Carpintero was held responsible for the mine's worst disaster. 50 dead from a vicious visit from Mr. Air Blast. A fissure broke and gases welled up in the tunnels. El Carpintero was meant to die, like the good canary he was employed as, but he couldn't. He was born to labor. He couldn't lift his beak from his precious work to notice his brothers gassed dead around him...

Hydraulicking, or ground sluicing, is the leveling of ground with high-powered hydraulics. Hydraulicking was first used in gold rush mining. Huge hoses were pumped with pressurized water from nearby bodies of water, and funneled to sites with the potential for gold deposits.



Everyone in Pancake was stirring, soaking their seeds in nostalgic normalcy, doing everything imaginable once more before the indefinable of renewal. Chano plays a game. He throws pennies down Bigelow Street. Copper corrals at the bottom of our 300 feet of 35 percent grade. He sits atop the asphalt, at The Pancakes' highest peak. Each coin echoes differently. Chano listens as he cherry-picks the Council meeting through his neighbors window...

Fittingly enough, hydraulicking has been banned in California since the gold rush because there is no clean slate when it comes to manipulating the landscape; manipulating Earth's ecosystem. Run-off leads to eutrophication and hypoxia, city planning segregates entire cities, redevelopment projects erase entire communities. Yes, even though hydraulicking was banned for commercial mining uses because it unearths and washes harmful minerals like Mercury into waterways, there was some loophole that allowed for its use in the destruction of urban hills, in the engineering of the West coast cityscape. Denny Hill was washed away by a hose. Bunker Hill was washed away by a hose. Or, more realistically, city planners gruelled over the pursuit of progress, hiding behind the power of a hose. Tediously pointing it towards a rock face for decades, waiting for it to disappear. And now, there's no Hill to rest on.

burnished brown bears right in high C.C....



on landfill hillsides

copper pieces carve striations

over glacial durations

under stress of steam shovel's duress

rubber burns as cars curl over Bigelow's brow...



making out the motor's trill

above him screeches shrapnel shrill

'til tires trail in token ridges

and rivals meet in downslope ditches

Chano watches worried still

From his fixture on the hill...

Pancake is the lonely neighborhood

enclosed within a ridge of Hills

known as the Pancake Hills. The

Pancake Hills are the newest neigh-

borhood in Los Angeles wedged

between the Elysian Hills and

downtown. Notoriously known as

the highest non-skyscraper peak in

downtown Los Angeles, their steep

grades are great bait for film and TV,

and for stuntmen of all kinds.

The car's fine. They do it all the time. They launch their hundred-year-old V-dubs off one side of the hill, and hope the other side catches them. It's stupid, but "Mira, this thing isn't just a car. Saturn's my world." Titán swoons his lover's decree to Júpi as they hop out of the ditched jalopy drenched in adrenaline.

"Well, you almost blew your world to pieces."

"Hah! That's nothing. She's terraformed to my liking. Been blown up and pieced back together over and over. Plus, it's that dumbass, Chano, sitting in the fuckin' street that had me swerving."

"Chano, man! You could've killed yourself!" Chano hasn't moved at all from take off 'til touchdown. He sits, frightened by his own foresight. The boys approach the woolly stump in jovial tears.

"Shit, you get a haircut?! Looks like that jump shaved off a few inches." They cackle together, forever reeling about something or another, looking to take it out on someone if not each other.

"Don't sit in the street. Cars drive on this shit, Jesu Christo!" They punch his biceps in unison; Chano could've guessed.

The pain breaks his silence. "There's only one way to look over a hill. You can fly over it in an airplane, but then it'd look just like any other parcel of land at an aerial view, two-dimensional. You can walk far enough away for it to shrink into the landscape, but there would still be something lying beyond, out-of-sight, hidden in its shadow. You can tear it down, but then there's no hill to overcome, nothing to work up to, and no view awarded at the top. No, the only way to look over a hill is to stand on top of it."

We made it home, LA's first Caribbean neighborhood, built on the spoil tip from Bunker Hill's unearthing. We got the best view in all of downtown. Well, actually the nearby Republic landfill has since succeeded the status, towering well over Pancake for nearly two decades now since 2045. I mean, how atro- cious! A landfill is the tallest Hill in the area, Gaudí would be sick. Yet, the situation is all the more nuanced when it's learned that most of the Pancake Hills are also a regulated and singly used. In the 1950s, Los Angeles began the destruc- tion of the now-de- veloped Bunker Hill, the refuse from the razing aggregated into a waste pile that would live in the neighborhood's back- yard for almost a hundred years. Thus, similarities can be drawn to the spoil tip of leads and phosphates that loom over mining towns in Missouri. Children growing up on hills of trash. The accumulated waste from human landscape destruction as a staple of urbanized Los Angeles.

Nobody asked. The boys had already felled Chano and packed him into their car. They were driving him home. Their mothers were friends, they knew Tía Luisa would be sick at the thought of Chano ideating atop that hill, but that's not something they'd ever care to say out loud. That they care about anybody. They pop a 3-point turn and clank on over the hill.

“Whatchu mumblin’ on about?”

“Yeah. That shit’s a done deal, man.”

“Yeah, maybe we need something here anyway. We’ve had to deal with so much bullshit since the city issued the first permit to build on these trash heaps.” Chano fans off the hot air emitting from these two celestial idiots. A lot of talk for some untethered bodies trapped in orbit above a hill. Too far out to lay a wheel on its peak, let alone their own feet. Chano, but-terflied, stares out his window at where he was once rooted.

“Can you guys just take me to the river?” Júpi and Titán knew all about Luis and his foolish fishing.

“You’re not telling me Luis goes there at night? Coño, what’s he doin’ in there? Skin-ny-dipping with ‘em?”

“¡Pinche! Catfish is the wrong kinda pussy, my guy. Bahaha...” Their snickers incon- spicuously blend with each other, yielding a sustained guffaw that fuels the car’s short journey to the river.



“What, you’re not gonna say thank you, Chano?”

“C’mon, give Papi a kiss goodnight.”

Chano closes the door, ungratefully ignoring the peanut gallery. It’s whatever to these cosmic idiots. They dash away in fumes of hot air shrieks and yucks. The night is as dark as light-polluted LA permits. Yellow street lamps shine on pools of oil-spent asphalt. The only light of any difference is Luis’ LED head strap shone on carp and bullhead swirling below; disturbed by his brutally blue surveillance. Luis is camped on the aggregate-dense concrete banks.

“Why do you fish at night?” Chano approaches Luis, and falls into immediate con- centration with him. It’s the one thing he demands, your focus.

“The bigger fish swim closer to the surface at night ‘cause it’s less of a danger.”

“Still a danger if you’re around.”

“Hah! Got that right. I’m always a danger.” He tugs on the line. “But I’m the most benevolent fisher they could ask for.”

“Why?”

“I always put ‘em back.” He yanks the line hard and pulls out a fat bass. He pinches its jaw ajar, and unhinges his hook. Its tail wails in mortal danger. “Big fish swim at night.” He’s always getting wise about something. “Ah, a new one. Two-hundred twelve. Remember that Chano.” He staples a tag to the flailing tail. It’s a Luis specific system. He loves his visitors, and always invites them back. He’s tracking their movements for some project. It’s too much to ask about. Chano just does as he says, realizing just how much he’s preoccupied with his own. Luis lets the largemouth loose, and it swims off, nervous for their next meet. “Which one was that?” He asks Chano just to make sure he was listening. Chano quietly complies.

“Two-hundred twelve.”

“Two... hundred and... twelve.” He jots it down, and returns to form. Line and light cast in the river, he waits. “So big guy, whatchu doin’ up this late?”

Chano’s confused. Nobody ever checks in with him, porque Chano’s the smart one.

“Right. The decision was today. Man, how long did they have Pluto talking for?”

“Five hours.”

“¡Que vaina! What a waste. We already know—”

“That shit’s a done deal.”

“No way, really?”

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“No, it was something else. Something better, bigger. She knows, even if Pancake began as a pile of waste, it’s become something bigger. The first American neighborhood made from repurposed waste, from reclaimed land. The first neighborhood to acknowledge the consequences of urbanization and do something real about it.” Chano never expects a response to his white noise discourse, but Luis is especially engaged tonight.

“Chano, I know you have your ideas about things, but what does it matter? It was all an accident. Thousands of Caribbean immigrants come to Los Angeles, seeking asylum after the hurricane. What were they gonna do with ‘em? They threw us on these hills, and turned away. They clowned us naming this place Pancake. We got the shit-end. And now they’re gonna take away the only land untouched by machines and build some rent-hiking development. It just keeps getting shittier.”



A century ago, Miller could foresee the troubled future-history between private developers and their renewal projects? Between private entities and the natural landscape? Between a father leading exodus and his pasture-clearing son. Landfill mining may give a purpose to the hills of waste that pollute our ecosystems, turning methane emissions into usable gas energy. By transporting landfills away from watersheds we might protect against the continual poisoning of our water sources. It's not that landfills are bad. It's that landfills, marshlands, urban blight, and Pancake—the abject aspects of our landscape—built or bestowed, are treated with disdain and apathy. Since our powerful destroyer Tabula Rasa is here to stay, might we learn how refuse may be our reward. May we learn how to break free from the struggle between our mighty progenitors and us degenerate children, and bridge ourselves closer to symbiosis with our environment. One must imagine Miller happy.

Between sub-surface smoldering events, spoil tip eruptions, and seasonal slag slides, Pancake has endured a lot. Uprooted land with a new purpose. Chano wouldn't see it any other way. He and Luis spent the rest of that night staring downward in ebbing UV screens of swirling static fishes. There's definitely something in the water, spoiled rotten.

The sun rises from the cement shore where they rest restless. The early morning sun-baked banks shake and rumble as the bull-run of dozers encroach. They climb the loose-grain bromine hillside with their clunky conveyor belt boots. Sunk in soft sand. Stuck in place for months of intimidation. Staring motionless at pulsing chat piles.

Sico wouldn't cut. The buzz of saw found its way into the bones of quiet canaries nested within the Oakamore, buzzing right back. The saw seeped into Sico's trunk as he grew around it. No matter how deep they dug, the bulk of Sico's roots lie unearthed, an iceberg submerged in developmental subconsciousness. Bedrock loosened and saturated in the water from an ancient cistern gated within Sico's arms. The slag slewed in swimmers' whirls, and an indefinite quicksand brewed.

The hose would never tap. The sea water turned to sugar water as it reached the Pancakes, clogging industry's arteries. Water lines would burst before they reached the 15 mile trek. The line-burst spouts showered Santee Alley in carbonated sugar water. Soda filled the streets from 1st until Washington and back, and syrup oozed all throughout Pancake, welling in Sico's whirlpool batter mix.

Chano licked every hilltop, hot butter liquifying before his very eyes. He watched with golden eyes as the syrup slowed and dried, freezing the development and life on Pancake altogether. His stack, well-preserved, as a translucent Mt. Vesuvius hidden in the middle of LA's sedated urban hustle...

NICO MORETA

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